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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 001782

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: TURKISH UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: WORRIED ABOUT JOBS,  
OPPOSED TO US POLICIES

Classified By: Political Counselor Janice Weiner for reasons 1.4(b),(d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: Separate discussions with Turkish students bound for America and several American English Language Fellows (ELFs) assigned to universities across Turkey for the past year provided insights on anti-Americanism, Turkey's secular-religious divide, election concerns, and the impact of Turkey's education system on the Turkish worldview. The Turkish students and American teachers, coming from a wide variety of cities and backgrounds, agreed that changing the education system is key to introducing greater tolerance as Turkish society modernizes. Anti-Americanism, which stems largely from Turks' widespread misperception that the US supports the PKK, has not dimmed the Turkish students' appreciation for American culture and technology, or their desire to visit the US. The Islamic headscarf remains a divisive issue at universities, and students and teachers alike said the religious-secular rift, unemployment and terrorism are top concerns as Turkey heads toward July 22 general elections. END SUMMARY.

ANTI-AMERICANISM:

12. (C) The ELFs agreed that most Turks' anger towards the United States derives from the misperception that America directly supports the terrorist Kurdistan Worker,s Party (PKK) -- an erroneous but widely-held view promulgated by the Turkish media. Fanned by a Turkish penchant for intrigue, the result has been anger and the flourishing of a host of subsidiary conspiracy theories. According to the ELF based in conservative Gaziantep, the wildest of these predicts that the United States will use Iraqi Kurdish leader Masoud Barzani and the PKK to create an independent Kurdistan, to which we will then transfer the entire US population in order to avoid an asteroid set to hit America sometime in the next fifty years. Despite the theory's absurdity, the Fellow heard it from a professor at Gaziantep University as well as others. The Turkish students we spoke with at a subsequent meeting were far more moderate. While they do not approve of US "support" for the (Iraqi) Kurds, or the actions of the American "state" in general, they admire American culture and technology, and are eager to visit the United States.

13. (C) Viewing America as an all-powerful puppet-master aligns with the Turkish worldview, according to the ELFs. In their interactions over the past year, they found that Turks often see themselves at the mercy of more powerful forces over which they have no control. They attributed this outlook to a variety of sources: partition of the Ottoman

Empire, the religious restrictions the Turkish state imposes, lack of critical thinking/problem solving skills, or shackling cultural practices such as arranged marriages, which are still prevalent in many areas.

#### EDUCATION AND THE TURKISH ETHOS

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14. (C) Whatever its roots, the ELF's agreed that Turkey's highly centralized government reinforces this view, especially through the educational system, which relies excessively on rote memorization and standardized testing. Students' career options are determined by their exam scores, with little flexibility to choose their preferred specializations or change their minds. Even after graduation, testing is still important, especially for teachers. Those who score well on certification exams serve at prestigious schools in Istanbul, Ankara and along the Aegean coast; those who score poorly go east, where conditions are difficult and resources more limited. Additionally, after students enter a course of study (determined by their exam scores), it is almost impossible for them to take any elective classes outside their program. One ELF reported that her student, a future teacher in the English education program, was not eligible to take a class in the special education program - a field very similar to her own and one in which all teachers should have some basic knowledge. The ELF's felt that the undiversified academic fare and rigid reliance on testing leaves Turks with a narrow skill set and a sense that individuals have little influence in the world.

#### SECULAR-RELIGIOUS DIVIDE

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15. (C) The ELF's depicted a tense relationship between religious and secular Turkish students on the sensitive headscarf issue. While technically banned, the rules for removing head scarves appear to vary by university, with some allowing students to wear them in class and others requiring students to remove them before passing through security checkpoints on the edge of campus. One ELF maintained the checkpoints were set up specifically to force students to remove their scarves rather than to check for security reasons. Pious students resent the intrusion, according to the ELF's, but the restrictions seem to strengthen their resolve to wear them. When students leave the school, they make sure that the American teachers see them with their headscarves on. Their long, modest dresses mark their piety even without the head covering, and attract scorn and hostility from some secular students. According to their secular students, the headscarf is more a political statement -- against secularism, modernity, and those who choose not to wear one -- than an expression of piety. Those who wear the headscarf tell them they see it as a religious requirement of the Koran. The issue of public religiosity has given rise to a double standard, the ELF's explained. In the Ministry of Education, where one Fellow worked, women cannot wear headscarves but men are permitted to pray openly in their offices.

#### ELECTION CONCERNS

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16. (U) Both the ELF's and the America-bound Turkish students we spoke with agreed that unemployment is an especially important issue for young people who will soon face the challenge of finding their first job. Many consider it less important than terrorism -- not surprising given that the males will soon face compulsory service in the military. One Turkish student claimed that he was waiting for the violence to die down before signing up to complete his service -- he had no intention of going any time soon. Another said he was timing his service for the winter, when clashes fall off due

to heavy snows in Turkey's troubled southeast.

17. (C) Heading into the July 22 general election, students held mixed views over Turkey's future. Many expressed concern over globalization and Turkey's economic future. One student even invoked Ataturk when she condemned the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) for privatizing a major bank recently; she claimed that the Republic's founder had personally made it the property of the state. Others agreed, charging that AKP is dismantling Ataturk's legacy through its economic reforms, and by undermining the secular policies of the state.

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